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AUTHOR Rollin, Roger B.
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ABSTRACT

This document describes seven distinct factors that affect the popularity of movies, using, as examples, the seven movies based on Shakespeare's work that have been produced since World War II. The seven factors, each of which is assigned a relative numerical weight, are formal publicity, or the money spent on accountable advertising such as that in newspapers; informal publicity, or nonaccountable promotions such as talk-show appearances; word-of-mouth advertising; which movie stars are in the cast; genre, the cyclical appeal of movies in categories such as "western," "love," and the "classic"; the competition, or mutually reinforcing effect, of other media, especially radio and television; and zeitgeist, or the taste and outlook characteristic of a historic period. The document concludes that the popularity of Shakespeare films is difficult to analyze given their status as "classics"; ironically, films labeled as classics are often rejected by the popular culture and will continue to be so treated unless teachers intervene. (CC)

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SHAKESPEARE OF HOLLYWOOD: THE BARD AND THE BEAUTIFUL

Roger B. Rollin

Two of the most vexed questions of Popular Culture study are also two of the most vital questions of Popular Culture study. They are questions which go directly to our very conception of our discipline, its methodologies, its future as an academic field, and as a culture force. Simply stated, the questions are (1) "What do we mean by 'popular'"; and (2) "What makes something 'popular'"? (A corollary of the second question is "Why do some things, deliberately designed for mass consumption, fail to achieve popularity?")

Neither question has yet received a definitive answer from Popular Culture scholars nor is there anything much resembling consensus concerning them. Perhaps the only way of answering the first question, "What do we mean by 'popular,'" is by stipulative definition, couched in terms of the specific problem posed: unlike some brands of pantyhose, one definition of "popular" will not fit all. Such is the strategy of this paper: here "popular" will describe any movie which was among the fifty top-grossing films in the U. S. and Canada during the year of its release. On the basis of such a definition, you might conclude, from the table you have in hand, that "Laurence Olivier has failed the Shakespeare-industry," or that "Shakespeare has failed the film industry." Both conclusions are objectionable, of course, and as our consideration proceeds I will suggest why, as conclusions, they are at once valid and simplistic. Objections might also be taken to my definition: to construe "popular"

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in terms of box office receipts would seem to be the grossest sort of measurement. And so it is--but quantification is really the only game in town. It is my belief that until Popular Culture study frees itself from impressionism, personal predelictions, and subjective evaluation, and defines its area of study in terms in which all scholars can have at least a measure of confidence, as a discipline it will continue to be fragmented and to progress only haltingly.

The second major question raised above, "What makes something 'popular,'" cannot be dealt with by a wave of a stipulative definition and a burst of arrogant rhetoric. In Hollywood and wherever else Popular Culture is made there are, at this very moment, very high-salaried people wrestling with versions of this same question. They have been wrestling with it for three-quarters of a century. Can a humble scholar succeed where expensive executives have failed? --It might make for a good movie, a kind of academic ROCKY, but as for here and now, all a humble English professor can come up with is a kind of prolegomenon in the form of an enumeration of the chief variables to be taken into account when specific problems of popularity are to be addressed.

For the purposes of such an exploration, Shakespeare of the movies is a convenient subject. The genre is a limited one, its representative examples are familiar to scholars, and statistics are about as readily available as they are for any Popular Culture sub-field.--But not, unfortunately, as available one would have hoped, which is why this paper only treats Shakespeare movies since World War II: VARIETY did not compile lists of top-grossing films in the Thirties and earlier Forties.

My general proposition, which will be applied to these specific films, is as follows: that seven distinct variables are operative in the phenomenon of the popular. There may be more; there cannot be less. So that you might test out my model by making your own quantitative analysis of movies of your choice, I will suggest a weight for each factor on a scale of zero to two, with ten being the highest score a release could obtain.

No. 1 The Formal-Publicity Factor. Here it is necessary to take into account the extent to which the movie was advertised. --Two stipulations--First, the answer must be quantitative, not qualitative: admittedly, a half-million dollar advertising campaign which employs a clever gimmick may well draw more people into a theatre than a half-million dollar campaign which lacks such a gimmick, but generally speaking, if advertising theory is anything to go on, there is more of a correlation between quantity of advertising and return than between "quality" and return. Second, this variable is restricted to advertising over which those operating the movie's production-distribution system have control--which is not the same thing as its total expenditures for publicity. The production-distributions system extends from the studio down to the neighborhood movie theatre and at every level some monies are spent in advertising. However monies are also spent on public relations staffs, promotional tours, and the like; but whereas a thousand dollars will purchase a known amount of newspaper advertising, a thousand dollars spent on a star's promotional tour yields no quantifiable advertising return. Thus, such non-accountable advertising must be taken into account elsewhere.

Obviously, even to begin to do the kind of research necessary to assess a Formal-Publicity Factor in the case of eight Shakespeare films would be a labor of months. I have not done it. I did not have the wit to anticipate what any social scientist would have realized early on: it is necessary to limit the size of the sample as much as possible--thus, not eight Shakespeare films but only Zefferelli's TAMING OF THE SHREW, for example.

Confining matters here to the eight films under consideration and not their competition, and drawing upon a fallible memory, it is my suggestion that only JULIUS CAESAR, TAMING OF THE SHREW, and ROMEO AND JULIET were given the big-budget treatment, whereas OTHELLO, RICHARD II, HAMLET, and HENRY V were at best given the "art-movie treatment." Of the latter, only HAMLET was popular--ranking 17th in 1948. Of the heavily advertised films, two out of three achieved popular success: ROMEO AND JULIET ranked No. 5 in 1968/69, TAMING OF THE SHREW a respectable twenty-eighth in 1967.

For a start, then, it would seem reasonable, in terms of the Formal-Publicity Factor, to assign a weight of up to 2 for high-budget promotion, 1 or .5 for less costly advertising campaigns.

No. 2 The Informal-Publicity Factor. As noted above, this includes budgeted but non-accountable promotions, such as publicity stunts, talk-show appearances, and the like. It would also include reviews, favorable or unfavorable. To maintain that "any publicity is good publicity" may be cynical, but there are too many cases wherein poorly reviewed films became box-office hits and vice-versa. (Oliver's Shakespeares routinely received ecstatic reviews, which would not likely have hurt their box office appeal but which obviously did little to help them.)

Here also determinations are difficult to make, but again the reliance must be upon quantity. The most recent examples of the effectiveness of saturation Informal Publicity are ROCKY and STAR WARS. Shakespeare was the Sylvester Stallone of the 1590s, but that was in another country, and besides, the man is dead.

Given the potential impact of this factor, let us assign it a weight of up to two, equal to that of the most effective Formal Publicity (but a weight likely to be awarded only rarely). --Though this may change, as the journalistic media discover that movies and TV are news, that reports about ROCKY or ROOTS sell newspapers and newsmagazines.

No. 3 The People-Publicity Factor. By this I mean the form of publicity most sought after by the production-distribution system and the most elusive: word-of-mouth advertising. A Shakespeare film has every English teacher in the country as its unpaid P. R. -Person, but in spite of that--or as I will later suggest--probably because of that, there is little evidence that the word travels beyond the classroom. It is reasonable to suppose Olivier's Academy Award helped to raise HAMLET to #17--Academy Awards are known to have box office power. But to me it is just as likely that the young, firm, and naked bodies of Olivia Hussey and Leonard Whiting were instrumental in the success of ROMEO AND JULIET--certainly more instrumental than the exhortations of parents and pedants.

Obviously, the problem with this factor is that it is extremely difficult to quantify: but the job could be done by a statistician as well equipped as those who mount political polls. Such a survey, yielding significant correlations, could on infrequent occasions

allow for a weighting up of to 2 on our scale--again the equivalent of a high-budget advertising campaign.

No. 4 The Star-Factor. Here again industry history suggests caution. The star-studded JULIUS CAESAR, including a Brando on his way to mythic status, had strong competition from vehicles featuring the likes of Sinatra and Lancaster, Peck, and Gable--but it also lost out to Vincent Price (then merely a character-actor) and Jose Ferrer. On the other hand, in 1968/69 Leonard Whiting and Olivia Hussey bested not only "The Duke" himself but also Hoffman and Voigt. Burton and Taylor, at the height of their publicity-generating power in 1967, fall before such British unknowns as Paul Schofield and Robert Shaw, Lynn Redgrave and Alan Bates.

Although exhibitors have in the past been wont to put very heavy weight indeed on the Star-Factor, prudence dictates alloting it at maximum a weight of 1. And in the case of the Shakespeare film, our evidence suggests that zero is the more likely weight. Olivier, though he be a god to us, is not worshipped at the box office.

At this point the phenomenon of the Director-as-Star bears mention. As everyone knows, the name "Hitchcock" is worth something. But though we cognoscenti will plan a night out to see "a Zefferelli," there is little evidence that the masses of ticket buyers know or care about directors other than Hitchcock. And it is quite possible that the drawing power of "Polanski" may be cancelled out by the reputation of MACBETH as a "classic."

No. 5 The Genre-Factor. As will be seen, here "genre" is used in no fine literary sense: THE GREEN YEARS and SPELLBOUND, for example, are both "Drama." When it comes to genre, the mass con-

sciousness classifies loosely--and its classifications can overlap.

For example, perceived as "Love," ROMEO AND JULIET has as its only serious competition (in 1968/69) GOODBYE, COLUMBUS, by no means a mid-Western LOVE STORY. Perceived as a "classic," it stands alone. FUNNY GIRL is "Musical" as is OLIVER, with the later possibly being classified also as "Juvenile" (along with THE LOVE BUG and CHITTY CHITTY BANG BANG, depending on the customer). BULLITT is "Cop" and TRUE GRIT and the Newman-Redford film are "Western." MIDNIGHT COWBOY is "Drama"--also a possibly category for the Zefferelli film.

TAMING OF THE SHREW, as "Comedy," competes with BAREFOOT IN THE PARK and GEORGY GIRL. This is also a year heavy in "Adventure." Not good, seemingly, for Shakespeare, although there is one surprise, what could also be viewed as a "classic"--A MAN FOR ALL SEASONS.

Olivier's HAMLET is a "Classic" or "Drama" and, interestingly, beats out Bogart's KEY LARGO (ranked #18 just after HAMLET in 1948). It is apparently, a reasonably good year for "Drama," with JOHNNY BELINDA, CASS TIMBERLAKE, GENTLEMEN'S AGREEMENT and STATE OF THE UNION. Putting the matter that way--"a good year for 'Drama'"--raises the question: do movies in the same genre compete with or complement each other? Nothing clear emerges from the examples just given: uniqueness scores in 1969, similarity in 1948, with 1967 presenting a mixed bag.

A more thorough study than I have been able to do would have to be mounted, but my prediction would be that a maximum weight of 1 on our scale could be factored in on grounds of a <u>complementary</u> relationship <u>within</u> genres: the cyclical nature of genre-appeal

(reinforced by movie-makers' inclination to imitate success) has been adequately documented.

No. 6 The Media Factor. Again, compete or complement?--that is the question. With radio not yet in its decline, HENRY V perishes and HAMLET does somewhat better than merely survive at the box office. Out of the jaws of television Polanski's MACBETH snatches defeat, ROMEO AND JULIET, victory. It takes no ghost sent from the grave to tell us that television's rise to dominance in the entertainment industry profoundly affected the movies. This, however, has been a long-term phenomenon: from entertainment season to entertainment season, the pattern is less evident. That television is the movies' major competitor is self-evident; that specific TV programming directly competes with the exhibition of specific movies (reruns being an exception) is not self-evident. With respect to Shakespeare the question is moot: being a rarity in any medium, the Bard does not compete with himself.

The argument for a complementary, mutually reinforcing intermedia relationship would proceed by analogy. A current event, widely publicized in the media, can trigger interest in movies: the death of an Elvis, for example. TV has resuscitated obscure novels like RICH MAN POOR MAN. Movies effectively trade upon the reputations of novels and even plays (like WHO'S AFRAID OF VIRGINIA WOOLF?). Were the forthcoming British TV series on the life of the Bard to be shown by a major network during prime time, a shrewd distributor might do worse than to schedule a festival of Shakespeare on film.

Serendipity, then, can enter into this factor. Another example:

when a song from a film's score makes it into radio's "Top 40"--call this "The Car Wash phenomenon." There can be little doubt that the box office gate of a GEORGY GIRL--or a ROMEO & JULIET--is significantly increased by the spill-over from the recording and radio media.

A clear medium tie-in then might warrant giving this factor a maximum weight of 1 on our scale; but all the Shakespeare films on our list score 0--except Zefferelli's ROMEO & JULIET.

No. 7 The Zeitgeist Factor. A pretentious label, admittedly, but apt enough.

Do the following observations explain unpopularity?

--HENRY V was a British war propaganda film. By 1946, the year of the movie's release in this country, we Americans had already won the war.

--By 1953, the year of the release of JULIUS CAESAR, the Eisenhower era had begun and Louis Calhern, stabbed in the Forum, even looked like Ike.

--In 1956 only the truly gifted saw the Richard III in Richard Nixon.

--In 1966, at the height of the civil rights movement, those who would associate Martin Luther King with miscegenation and murder were unlikely to flock to showings of OTHELLO.

By the same token, do the following observations explain popularity?

--By 1948, the year of HAMLET'S release suspicion was rife that something was rotten in the state of the world (and it was the Reds).

--In 1967, with the civil rights movement strong, Viet Nam war dissent growing, and Women's Liberation about the spring into national

prominence, THE TAMING OF THE SHREW, a "classic" with fashionable stars, provided a gratifying regression to a world of traditional values.

--The year of the release of ROMEO AND JULIET, 1969, was a time when the mottc of the movie-going generation was "Make Love, Not War."

Such a recitation is something of an embarrassment. It would seem to be quite possible to analyze the Zeitgeist so as to demonstrate the opposite--for example, to show the Polanski's MACBETH, which also featured some attractive nudity, which exposed violence in all its horror, which graphically dramatized the corruption of power, had to succeed in the era of the Imperial Presidency and THE GODFATHER. Certainly it is too often the case that film critics trot out the Zeitgeist-factor as a glib explanation of popular success or failure. On the other hand, there is no reason why careful students of Popular Culture cannot arrive at assessments of the Zeitgeist that are as judicious as those of social critics and social historians and, when correlated with the six other variables indicated here, as valid and viable for purposes of analysis.

Nonetheless, so long as popularity can be affected by such diverse private motivations as escape and involvement, it would be inappropriate to assign a weight of more than 1 to this factor, and then only when the correlation is obvious, as in the case of an ALL THE PRESIDENT'S MEN. Zeitgeist does not go far towards explaining STAR WARS, for example, however fashionable it has been to do so. Movies have always been good at treating the mythic: the continuing popularity of the James Bond series is an indication that the collective mythic consciousness is ever ready to be energized.

The special difficulty inherent in investigating the popularity of Shakespeare films utilizing the analytical model proposed here is their status as "classics." The irony is inescapable: the honorific attributions, a "classic," implying a work universally admired, all too often seems to result in universal rejection when the work becomes the basis for a movie. In the years scrutinized in this paper unquestionable popular success was achieved only by WAR AND PEACE (1956) and MOBY DICK (1956)--and ROMEO AND JULIET.

Why ROMEO AND JULIET? Taking the seven factors into account as objectively as I could, I scored the Zeferelli movie at 7.5 out of a possible 10. Such a rating at least provides a working hypothesis about its popularity--something to test. I do not, however, imply that mine is the only analytical model possible. Adopting a psychoanalytical model, for example, one could conclude that ROMEO AND JULIET transcended its status as a "classic" by affording the individual movie-goer a unique opportunity, that of meeting the demands of the id and the superego simultaneously. On the one hand the film's romantic plot and camera work, its attractive protagonists, and the tasteful eroticism of the nude sequence, all offered vicarious gratification to the id. On the other hand, attending such a "classic" was a way of appearing to obey the internalized demands of parents and teachers, who have used their authority to imbue an appreciation of the classics with moral superiority.

Which brings me to a polemical conclusion. As educators and parents we constantly decry the resistance of the young to the "classics" and tend to lay the blame, at worse, on the defective collective character of the younger generation or, at best, upon the

aesthetic barriers posed by a Shakespeare. If my exploration of this particular problem in popularity has suggested anything to me as a teacher, it is that the fault lies not in the stars, nor in the audience, but in ourselves. If Shakespeare is unpopular, even in the movies, we teachers must be doing something wrong.

--Roger B. Rollin
English Department
Clemson University
Clemson, SC 29631

HENRY V (1946) Ranking: NL*	1. Bells of St. Mary's 2. Leave Her to Heaven 3. Blue Skies	4. Road to Utopia 5. Spellbound 6. The Green Years
HAMLET (1948) Ranking: #18	1. Road to Rio 2. Easter Parade 3. Red River	4. The Three Musketeers 5. Johnny Belinda 6. Cass Timberlane
JULIUS CAESAR (1952) Ranking: NL*	1. The Robe 2. From Here to Eternity 3. Shane	4. How to Marry a Millionare 5. Peter Pan 6. Hans Christian Andersen
RICHARD III (1956) Ranking: NL*	1. Guys and Dolls 2. The King and I 3. Trapeze	4. High Society 5. I'll Cry Tomorrow 6. Picnic
OTHELLO (1966) Ranking: NL*	1. Thunderball 2. Dr. Zhivago 3. Who's Afraid of V. Woolf	4. That Darn Cat 5. Russians Are Coming 6. Lt. Robinson Crusoe
THE TAMING OF THE SHREW (1967) Ranking: #28	1. The Dirty Dozen 2. You Only Live Twice 3. Casino Royale	4. A Man For All Seasons 5. Thoroughly Modern Millie 6. Barefoot in the Park
ROMEO AND JULIET (1968/9) Ranking: #5	1. The Love Bug 2. Funny Girl 3. Bullitt	4. Butch C. & Sundance K. 5. Romeo and Juliet 6. True Grit
MACBETH (1971/2) Ranking: NL*	1. The Godfather 2. Fiddler on the Roof 3. Diamonds Are Forever	4. What's Up, Doc 5. Dirty Harry 6. The Last Picture Show

+Supplement to "Shakespeare of Hollywood: The Bard and the Beautiful"--Roger Rollin, Clemson University. (With thanks for data-compilation to Ms. Laura Suits, M.A., Clemson University.)

*Not listed among the top 50 box office attractions (U. S., Canada) according to Variety projections.

7. Adventure 8. Easy to Wed 9. Notorious	10. Two Years Before the Mast
7. Emperor Waltz 8. Gentlemens' Agreement 9. A Date With Judy	10. The Captain from Castile
7. House of Wax 8. Mogambo 9. Gentlemen Prefer Blondes	10. Moulin Rouge
7. War and Peace 8. The Eddy Duchin Story 9. Moby Dick	10. The Searchers
7. The Silencers 8. Torn Curtain 9. Our Man Flint	10. A Patch of Blue
7. Georgy Girl 8. To Sir With Love 9. Grand Prix	10. Hombre
7. Midnight Cowboy 8. Oliver 9. Goodbye, Columbus	10. Chitty Chitty Bang Bang
7. A Clockwork Orange 8. Cabaret 9. The Hospital	10. Everything You Always... Know...Sex

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